

A tall order

Short people must unite against discrimination, oppression



Before I was born, the world was against me. A little despondent, you say? Probably. But everyone else is crying discrimination, so I have something to add to the bunch.

I am a proud 4 feet, 11 1/4 inches. Before I was born, a song was created in protest against me.

"Short people got no reason ... to live."
Have you ever heard it? Yeah. Luckily, so have I.

I say luckily because thanks to that song, I have a little better understanding of the world around me.

I comprehend. When I was a mere 4 years of age, a social worker was called in to examine my brothers' and my yearly medical check-up.

The state was actually considering the option of investigating my parents because of a malnutrition accusation.

Apparently, my siblings and I were too little. The state of Minnesota was actually going to go ahead with the charges until they saw my parents standing tall at a towering 5-foot-2 and 5-foot-6.

Luckily, my brothers grew into "normal" sizes. I, however, quit growing in height in fifth grade.

I know the definitions.

Minute: of little importance or significance; petty; trifling.

Short: not long or not long enough.

I know the slang: Smurf, chipmunk, pebble, bead, acorn (that's even Shakespearean), midjet, dwarf, etc.

I can understand, but not empathize, with the oppressing situation.

I have explanations for how I am treated. Repeatedly, I am assailed with inquiries. "How do you drive?"

With one foot on the clutch, and one on the gas, imbecile.

"How can you walk and keep your balance with feet that small?"

Well, how can you talk with a brain that small?

"Do you have a hard time finding clothes that fit?"

No. In fact, children's sizes are cheaper. Do you see what I'm talking about? It's as though the world thinks short people are a lost cause.

Pets needing extra-loving care and attention. Children to be condescended to. Peons worthy only of patient attention.

Well, I have news for you. We don't need your pity.

We are cuter than most pets.

We often find ourselves condescending to your condescension.

And you would not believe the patience necessary to listen to babble about how you've hurt our feelings when accidentally referring to our inability to see in a crowd.

Guess what? You're not equipping us with a stunning revelation. We're well aware of our height.

In fact, I'm reminded of people's inability to embrace the "different" on an almost daily basis.

This past weekend, a friend and I decided to dine out at the fine institution of Carlos O'Kelley's. I approached the reception area and stated our agenda. "We'd like to eat."

I was greeted with an odd look, so I tried again. "Hi. Two for non-smoking. Jessi is the name." The woman in charge, at this point, simply stared at me.

Stared pointedly down at me.

So rather than haggle with the woman over the rights of the microscopic to eat a full meal, my significantly taller friend stepped in to take over.

Needless to say, we were still told it would be half an hour. There's discrimination for you.

Not enough to warrant a complaint, you say? Well, let me add to the agenda of the "vertically challenged," as the ever-pretentious mobs insist on calling us.

We want freedom! We want equality! We want to buy a ticket to a PG-13 movie without being carded!

I have an odd sense of interpersonal space, instilled in me from the time I was considered, and thus treated, as paranormal.

The "average" person's interpersonal dis-

tance ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. After 4 feet, that distance becomes your public territory.

That's 4 feet horizontally, my friend. Very funny.

Anyway, my sense of space is slightly larger. I have a somewhat greater need for an expanded personal bubble.

If you had people reaching over you on a constant basis, you'd understand.

If your hair was pet at least once a week, your shoulder used as an arm rest by strangers.

If you were given a stunned reaction every time you passed someone taller than you on the sidewalk, you'd sympathize.

Maybe.

OK. Let me convince you.

I am a person. A human being.

There's no use anthropomorphizing me, 'cause I'm human.

I'm a goddess, already.

So there!

That's it!

The oppression of my people has been drawn

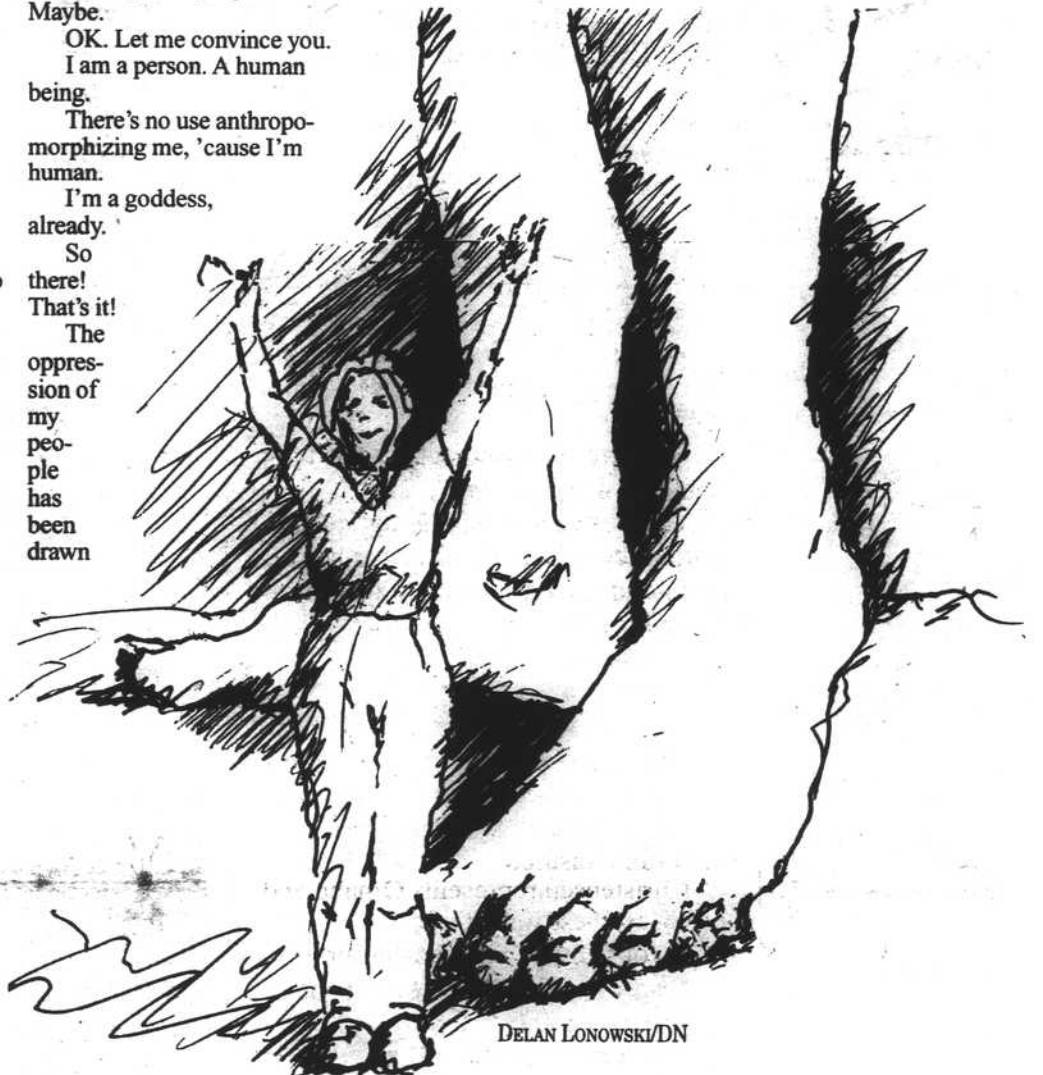
out too long!

A state of balance must be created to sustain this contributing minority population of society. No longer will we allow "The Man" to put us down!

We are not going to stand it any longer! We demand that you respect us. We demand that you treat us the same as everyone else.

Beware. On that day when we take over the world, you will regret it.

Because you'll hit your head on every doorway imaginable. Our glass ceiling will physically exist.



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Do it

Travel abroad using five easy steps



"Just do it."

I give a lot of advice to a lot of people, especially about traveling and living overseas. The more I talk about it, tell my stories and explain how to travel, the more I find myself using Nike's simplistic slogan.

"Just do it."

I don't like it. I think it's rude and too short. But it really is the best advice I can give anybody. Let me explain.

Monday night I was talking to my new friend Amy about traveling over a crisp, cold one at Crane River. Amy is a bright girl, with a nose for adventure. She's been patient, but now she is eager to get out of the country and get a taste for the diversity she's already scented.

Amy comes from a small town in Nebraska. She graduates soon and doesn't know what to do with herself after graduation. She's been working hard for her degree, but now she's aware that it's time for a major change in her life. With a career and responsible adulthood looming near, now is the best time for her to

satiate these desires.

"Listen," I said to Amy, "traveling and studying abroad sounds like a bigger monster than it really is. You're afraid of it or have been putting it off because you don't know how easy it is or where to start. Well, I've got a five-step plan to get you anywhere in the world doing anything you want to do."

1. Pick a place you are interested in going to. I recommend that you do not go to Europe. Europe sucks. It's boring. It's, relatively speaking, the same as the U.S. The people are rude, it's too expensive, and the weather stinks.
2. Do your homework on the place. This includes researching all programs that go there. There are study-abroads, work-abroads, volunteer-abroads and infinite options for the individual program. It's also mandatory to read about the history of the people before you go. They'll appreciate your knowledge of their country, and you'll appreciate their culture that much more.
3. Apply to the program. You'll get in. Apply for a passport. You'll get it. Apply for a visa if needed. You'll get it, too. Don't lose these things.
4. Take some time off before you go to make some money. Before I did my jaunt around the world, I worked two jobs, 70 hours a week, for four months. I made 10 grand and brought half of it with me. This will greatly extend the options you have once there.
5. Buy a ticket, and get on the plane. Find a cheap ticket on the Web. Try to buy it at least two months in advance. Pack only the essentials, as the things you'll really need are either

cheaper to buy where you are going or not needed, as you will soon find out.

Don't make any excuses. Just do it. It's kind of like riding a bike; only common sense will prevent you from losing your balance. After you do it once, you'll realize how easy it really is. Soon enough you'll find yourself gravitating toward maps pointing out "where you've been."

Whether you are going to the Mongolian Steppe to study paleontology or to South Africa to study the post-apartheid reconciliation process, this is how you do it.

While this method applies to those who want to do something productive overseas, there's also plenty of options for the adventure-seeking/soul-searching nomads out there.

(Warning: a great deal of the following text is taken from Fielding's "The World's Most Dangerous Places.")

Enter the modern touristic domesticus. They travel in predictably jabbering gaggles, following well-worn trails. Monolingual, they pay little attention to their environment since they are terrified of being left behind or having the bus leave without them.

They are usually wearing outlandish colorful plumage. Gray walking shoes sprout cream of mushroom legs marbled with blue veins topped off by what could be a spare tire or a bulging overstuffed money belt.

They arrive in shiny buses with big sun-roofs, descending like locusts, as they strip souvenir stands clean and cluster in tight groups under the watchful eye of an overly pleasant multilingual guide holding an umbrella.

These types of tourists are not bad people, but they are the main source of sustenance for

touts, louts and thugs. Some of them do funny things. They sneak away from those bus tour hotels and migrate to seedy places to watch local women take their clothes off. They drink too much. They make friends too easily. They stay out too late. They stagger home at four in the morning singing German drinking songs.

There is a sub-species of the touristic domesticus that I would recommend you study and eventually evolve into when you start your bon voyage. It is the fabled touristic backpackensius.

Unlike the much-derided domestic version, this species is much more adapted to its surroundings. The key indicators are hiking boots, hairy legs with knobby knees, T-shirts with politically correct slogans and the omnipresent shoestring guides to conquering the world. They like to think they are independent, even though they bunch up at the same youth hostels each night.

The backpackensius sub-species is infamous for initiating Western penetration into every local habitat it encounters. I've found significant numbers of backpackensius apparently in their breeding season and in their chemical supplement season, everywhere from the beaches of Goa, India, to obscure villages in Africa, to remote islands in the South China Sea.

Wherever you go, the different species of touristicus will warmly welcome you into their herd. I recommend you spend as little time as possible with them before you venture out into the indigenous surroundings.

Still don't understand? I can't explain anymore. It's time to just do it.

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